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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (08/18): President Abbas Chairs
Weekly Cabinet Meeting

Main Stories:

The dailies front page news on the weekly cabinet meeting in Ramallah on August 17 chaired by Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas. PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad presented the president with a document that lays out a path leading to the establishment of a Palestinian state in two years. Abbas praised the work of the Prime Minister and his government, and renewed his calls on Israel to completely halt all settlement activity. Al-Ayyam also quotes Abbas saying that "We can't ignore the fact that Hamas exists and is part of the Palestinian society. We are committed to supporting the national unity dialogue with all factions."

News on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on August 17 also receives front page coverage. The reports state that Clinton and Mubarak discussed the Middle East peace process, noting that Clinton was optimistic a deal could be reached. Mubarak noted that the Arab states will normalize relations with Israel only after reaching a fair and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, according to coverage.

Al-Ayyam front pages news that an improvement in the security situation in the West Bank over the past two years led to a decision by the US State Department to impose fewer travel restrictions on its employees working in the West Bank. The report quotes a travel warning issued by the State Department stating "the security environment in the West Bank has improved markedly since June 2007, with a significant increase in the number of trained Palestinian Authority security forces deployed to urban areas such as Jericho, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Jenin." -----
BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Muhannad Abdel Hamid opines in Al-Ayyam independent daily under the title, " Hamas: Outwardly Moderate, Inwardly Extremist" (08/18): "As Hamas wants to be seen as a moderate Muslim faction, its leaders have started announcing that they are in favor of the two state solution and that they are willing to be part of a peace conference ... However, when the real test came, Hamas revealed itself as an extremist movement. No matter how much power it takes, it won't allow any faction to take over its role."

2) Ahmad Zakarneh opines in Al-Hayat Al-Jadida official daily under the title "Extreme freedom, extreme chaos" (08/18): "We all want freedom - freedom of expression, freedom of ideology, freedom of belief. However, would we as Palestinians be able to manage and enjoy this freedom? Would we be able to live with it without causing chaos? Would we be able to appreciate how valuable it is to be free, or would we forget about freedom and oppress each other the first chance we have?"

WALLES